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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLIES -- No. 1924.

A radio talk by W. W. Vincent, chief, western district, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Agriculture, delivered through Station KFO, San Francisco and associated stations, Thursday, November 20, 1930.

Good Morning, Folks! For many weeks, I have been telling you how your foods and drugs are safeguarded through the enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act, and I have been telling you how to read food and drug labels. I have discussed many products, and tried to give you such information as would enable you to read labels intelligently and thus buy foods and drugs with discrimination. I have told you surprising true stories about our work of enforcing the Federal Food and Drugs Act.

We no longer number our label-readers by the hundreds. Thousands are reading labels and I apologize, if, occasionally, we are a little slow in mailing our "Read-the-Label" information. This "Read-the-Label" information is free to all who request it.

I have told you how your government officials protect you against food frauds that might be committed by the few bad packers and bad importers, but have yet to tell how we have foiled some rather bad distributors -- especially people who deal in salvage goods, and people who deal in low-grade food commodities. We have them -- quite a few concerns throughout the whole United States. While our manufactured foods and drugs have reached a high plane of quality, it nevertheless requires constant vigilance on the part of your food authorities to maintain them there by making sure that the occasional careless, uninformed or unscrupulous manufacturer is forced to produce a product both safe and of good quality, and truthfully labeled.

Let me tell of a distributor not so particular as to the quality of merchandize he handles, and how he snarled himself in the net of his own trickery. This fellow is operating in one of our Western cities, running a brokerage firm. On May 19, 1930, he sent out a letter. The letter said---

"Gentlemen: We are in the market for all kinds of canned and bottled goods which may be seconds, off-grade, dented, rusted, fire stock, or any surplus stock of the previous year's pack that you may care to dispose of at a clean-up price. The only requirement we make is that this merchandize comply with pure food laws. We buy such canned and bottled goods on a strictly cash basis".

Folks, your food and drug agents look with disfavor on traffic in such described food products, but the fact remains that unless the products are actually filthy, unwholesome, or unfit for food, or otherwise adulterated, or misbranded, no legal action is possible. Salvage stocks are usually of questionable character.

That broker's letter got results. A mid-western pea canner wrote that he was sending him two sample tins of ungraded Alaska Peas of which he had four or five hundred cases in stock. The canner requested the broker's best offer. Well, the broker bought 75⁴ cases and it looks like the pea canner put one over on him. The canner shipped this broker unlabeled peas. When your food and drug agent first learned of these peas, they were being labeled as "Early June Peas" and as distributed by a firm in Louisville, Ky. The canner didn't ship the broker Alaska peas as offered - nor did he ship him early June peas, as they were being labeled - nor did he ship him rotten peas. My friends, you can't guess what these cans contained and I am afraid I can't tell you exactly. You ask why. Well, we examined only 26 cans of that material. Here is what the analysis showed. The 26-can sample represented two lots. Twelve cans bore a code mark. In addition to some peas, here's what your government chemist got from those 12 cans. He actually found 528 thistle buds, 121 pea pods, leaves or bits of straw, 21 rocks, 25 weed seeds, two worms and 76 flower heads. The 14 uncoded cans didn't yield so much material, but a better variety. Listen! This time the chemist found 43 thistle buds, 58 pods, leaves or pieces of straw, eighteen rocks, 5 weed seeds, 39 brown peas, which are worthless, one flower head, one piece of string five inches in length, and the wrapper from a nationally-advertised candy bar. One dead grasshopper completed the assortment. I'm sorry our chemists didn't examine more cans. Perhaps they would have found the candy bar.

Your Federal agents succeeded in rounding up most of these peas and they were seized by the U. S. Marshal. Neither the packer nor the broker had the effrontery necessary to defend this product in Federal court and, on Sept. 29, 1930, the U. S. Marshal was ordered to destroy the material.

My friends, cases of this sort illustrate how necessary it is that you have active and efficient enforcement of your food and drug laws. Individuals cannot protect themselves from men who pack and traffic in such material. I will tell of an incident called to our attention by a Wyoming lady who received a shipment of foodstuffs from a Kansas City dealer. She had placed the order through a salesman who travelled in an expensive automobile. When it came to discussing food, she reported that "He knew his onions". He conversed freely and intelligently on dietetics, food compositions and combinations, and their effects on people. Her material finally arrived. After unpacking it she later reported in part as follows:

"The cans were old and rusty-looking on the outside, half of them bulging. The fruits were not of the variety ordered. Upon opening cans I found the fruits dry and tasteless, or mashed and packed in a sirup with a peculiar or unwholesome odor. The dried fruits were certainly dry-- almost crumbly, and disgustingly full of worms. The dried cereals were full of insects which did not show until the cereal was placed in a pan and covered with cold water. In a few seconds, tiny bugs and insects would begin to crawl up on the sides of the receptacle or swim on the top of the water. The tea was mixed with peculiar, twisted, dried things that she had never seen in any other blend. The coffee was impossible."

With her report she enclosed a clipping, an editorial, from a western newspaper, which she said made reference to the shipping firm. It was headed "We Warn You". It read as follows:

"Reports now coming to us would indicate that agents, who say they are representing a Kansas City grocery house, are again in the field. Now, folks, if you like wormy peaches, nitty prunes and stale canned goods, these are the boys you want to patronize, but we warn you not to pay them a cent in advance if you ever expect to get anything for your money".

Immediately this report was received we requested cooperation from the Wyoming Food Commissioner. We called upon the lady and submitted to our Denver Laboratory such material as remained. We received three cans of what were supposed to be black raspberries. One can was a hard swell, one bulged slightly, and one was normal. All three cans contained oysters. Apparently the lady had ordered blackberries, but had gotten oysters and two of the three cans submitted were abnormal. Her figs contained weevils and a few live beetles. Her raisins were badly contaminated. Her rolled wheat contained numerous worms one-half inch long which were alive and active. And when that wheat was placed in water, many small beetles rose to the surface. Her rolled oats, while good in appearance, would, when placed in water, yield a few dead weevils. Our Denver chemists judged the lot a salvage stock and you can be assured this firm's activities were given immediate attention by your food and drug agents. Were there no enforcement of Food and Drug laws, there would be more concerns engaged in the handling of questionable salvage merchandize. Dealers in salvage stocks are known to your city, State and Federal food and drug agents and their activities are constantly watched.

Well, I was going to tell you more about the canning business. I haven't discussed canned fruit. Lots of fruit is canned in the United States. Last year, in California alone, something over eight million cases of peaches, over four million cases of apricots, and over two million cases of pears were produced. This year, the peach pack will exceed 13 million cases. That represents just about three No. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cans for every individual in the United States. I can tell you what the commercial grades for these fruits are and it's up to you to discover the best buys.

The Government standard for canned fruit calls for the clean, sound product made from properly prepared fresh fruit, with or without water and sucrose, that is, cane or beet sugar. It may be processed in a hermetically sealed container or, first cooked and then packed in a suitable container, after which it is hermetically sealed.

California is the largest producer of canned fruit, both in volume and varieties packed and the grades established by the Cannery League of California can be said to be representative for California fruit. The principal varieties canned are apricots, pears, peaches, both halves and slices, cherries and plums. In the packing process, cans are filled as full as practicable with fruit and the spaces between the pieces filled with sugar syrup or water. Strength of sugar syrup varies with grade.

There are four general grades for all varieties, under the Cannery League specifications, namely, "Fancy", "Choice", "Standard" and "Seconds."

(1) "Fancy" apricots, peaches and plums are packed in 55% sugar sirup solutions; the "Choice" grade in 40% sugar sirup solution; the "Standard" grade in 25% sugar sirup solution; and the "Seconds" grade, which contains several classifications, may be in either a 10% sugar sirup solution, or a water pack. The "Fancy" grade requires fruit of very fine quality, free from blemishes, with the material uniform in size and symmetrical.

(2) The "Choice" grade requires the use of ripe fruit of fine quality, free from blemishes and uniform in size. Except for sirup strength, the difference between "Choice" and "Fancy" grades is largely one of symmetry and workmanship.

(3) In general, the "Standard" grades can be said to contain fruit of good quality, of reasonably good color and reasonably free from blemishes. There will not be quite the uniformity in size, color and degree of ripeness that is to be found in the two better grades.

(4) You do not ordinarily see the "Seconds" since it is the material generally packed in large or No. 10 tins and the cans, if packed in California, have the word "Seconds" printed on the top of the can. If packed in a 10% sirup you will find the words "Seconds Wholesome fruit unsuited for the better table grades - in light sirup." If packed in water, the same designation will appear except that instead of the words "In light sirup" will appear the phrase "Without added sugar." You may find fruit heavily trimmed, with minor blemishes, that which is somewhat immature or over ripe, and that which is not so uniform in size or appearance, in the "Seconds" grade.

The same grades, names and descriptions as given apply to pears, cherries and Muscat grapes, except for strength of sugar sirups employed. With these three fruits, the "Fancy" grade requires but a 40% sugar sirup; the "Choice" a 30% sugar sirup; and the "Standard" a 20% sugar sirup.

The standards provide a maximum number of apricots, pears, peaches and cherries that may be present in each size can of each grade and, in addition, maximum variation in the number of pieces of fruit that may be present in the individual cans.

My friends, the packers do not always tell you upon the labels which of their products are of "Fancy", "Choice" or "Standard" grade. The "Fancy" grade is generally to be found under the leading, or first, brands of packers or distributors. Look for the net-weight statement when you buy canned fruits and, remember, when reading the advertisements offering bargains, that the No. 1 fruit can does not contain one pound but generally about 10 ounces, the No. 2 can contains about 1 lb. and 4 oz., the No. 2½ can about 1 lb. and 12 oz., and the No. 10 can, sometimes called a gallon, about 6 lbs. and 4 oz.

The No. 10 can contains not a gallon, but about three quarts.

You may depend on your cans of fruit being well filled with fruit, and not essentially with sirup or water. Your Food and Drug Administration holds as adulterated such packs as contain more water, sirup or brine than is necessary for their proper preparation and sterilization. The fill-of-can requirement of the Food and Drug Administration is known to all packers and food and drug agents check them up.

There is more that I should tell you about canned fruits - interesting facts about olives, pineapples and berries. I will come back to them at a later date.

This concludes my twenty-fourth talk. Next week I guess I shall discuss fish - sardines - mackerel - herring and maybe some others. If you are interested in securing this "read-the-label" information I have been distributing on the many food products discussed, just drop a post card to W. W. Vincent, care the station or U. S. Food and Drug Laboratory, San Francisco. That's all today.

